# Xeroxmorphs in Dittoland - Robin Hood - Legend Quest

Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

None of this would have been possible without the fantastic resources generously provided by immensely talented emulator authors, and communities such as Hall of Light, Lemon Amiga, Lemon 64, World of Spectrum, Moby Games, World of Longplays and Recorded Amiga Games. Thank you for your tireless dedication to preserving the history of gaming.

The Oliver Twins will forever be indebted to the bow and arrow wielding outlaw with a penchant for fleecing the loaded and nourishing the poor. Way back in 1986 he was the centrepiece of their inaugural, full commercial release, Super Robin Hood for the Amstrad CPC.

"Why the Robin Hood theme?", you may wonder. Well, because the mythos surrounding the Lincoln green legend and his supporting cast are believed to date back as far as the 12th century, no-one actually lays claim to the rights to produce creative works based on the characters. The upshot is that Robin comes as a pre-packaged, recognisable figure, replete with a back-story - and critically - no license fees to pay! It was an ingenious way to break into the industry, *without* breaking the bank.

The pair were 17 years old at the time (both of them simultaneously!) when they approached the Darling Brothers at the European Computer Trade Show to ascertain the likelihood of them publishing the game. As luck would have it, David and Richard Darling had been coding their own games and releasing them under the Mastertronics label, though were looking to branch out by plunging headlong into the self-publishing realm. The trade name they chose to operate under was none other than 'Codemasters'; you may have heard of them - they developed and/or published games on all the major platforms, for all the 'bits' and beyond, and are still going strong to this day.
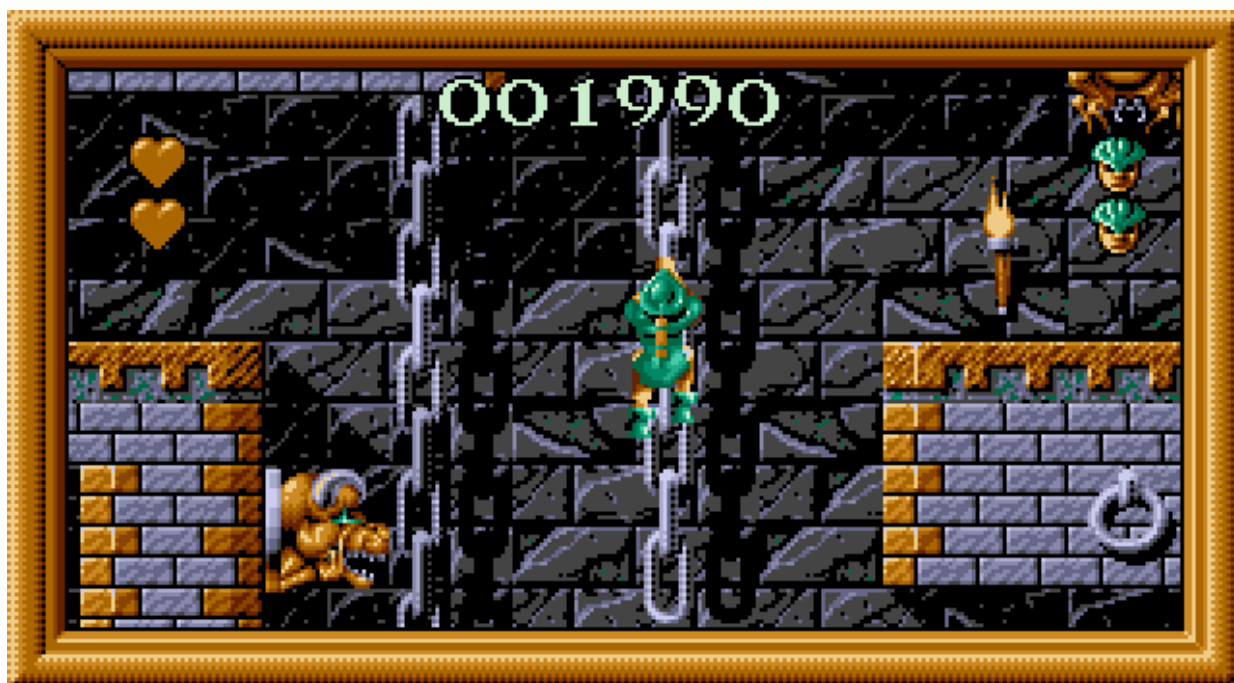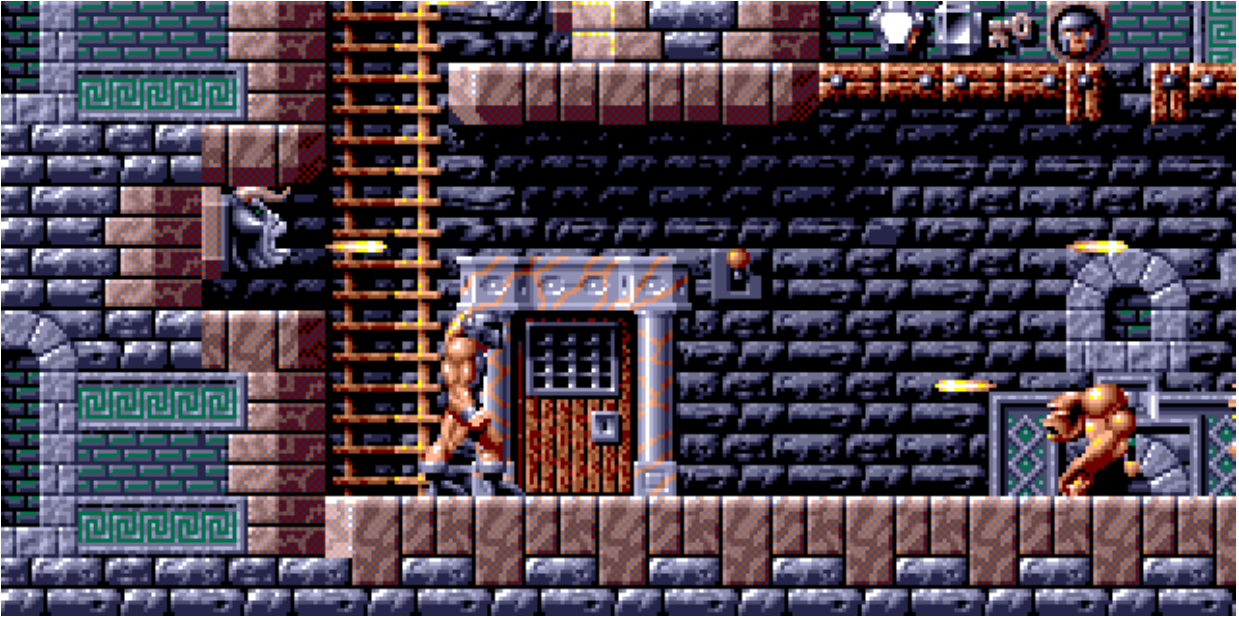
Ca-moo-flaged Minotaurs on a steak-out. No bull!

In addition to shoehorning their own creations onto the retail shelves, Codemasters proposed to take under their wings a number of fledgeling developers with the intention of releasing their wares as budget titles. Andrew and Philip showed their work in progress blueprints to the Darlings who immediately promised to make it the hit they were certain it deserved to be.

The archery-typal 1986 Amstrad version in all its delectable, multi-coloured glory (though it looks rather tasty on a green screen too apparently). Headlining is the real-live voice of Mummy Oliver trivia fans!

AA Rave - 85%

"It's an easy game to get into but with plenty of screens and hazards to keep you occupied. The catchy tune that plays throughout the action, the speech, animation and gameplay all go to make a very enjoyable game at a marvellous price".

BW, Amstrad Action 18 (03.87)

"Lots of lovely speech. Lots of loathsome characters (bar Robin and Maid Marian of course). Lots of labyrinthine rooms. Lots of lively gameplay. In fact, it's a lot of game for less'n £2."

RpM, Amstrad Action 18 (03.87)

The twins were offered a fee of £10,000 to sign on the dotted line, yet when they delved into the contract's fine print it transpired that the deal on the table was actually for royalty payments amounting to 10 pence per copy sold. The Darlings expected the platform-puzzler to shift 100,000 cassette units, hence the dizzying initial figure arrived at. Undeterred, the twins acquiesced, accepting the deal under the revised terms, and true to their word, Codemasters made it a massive no. 1 best-selling hit and paid their dues accordingly.
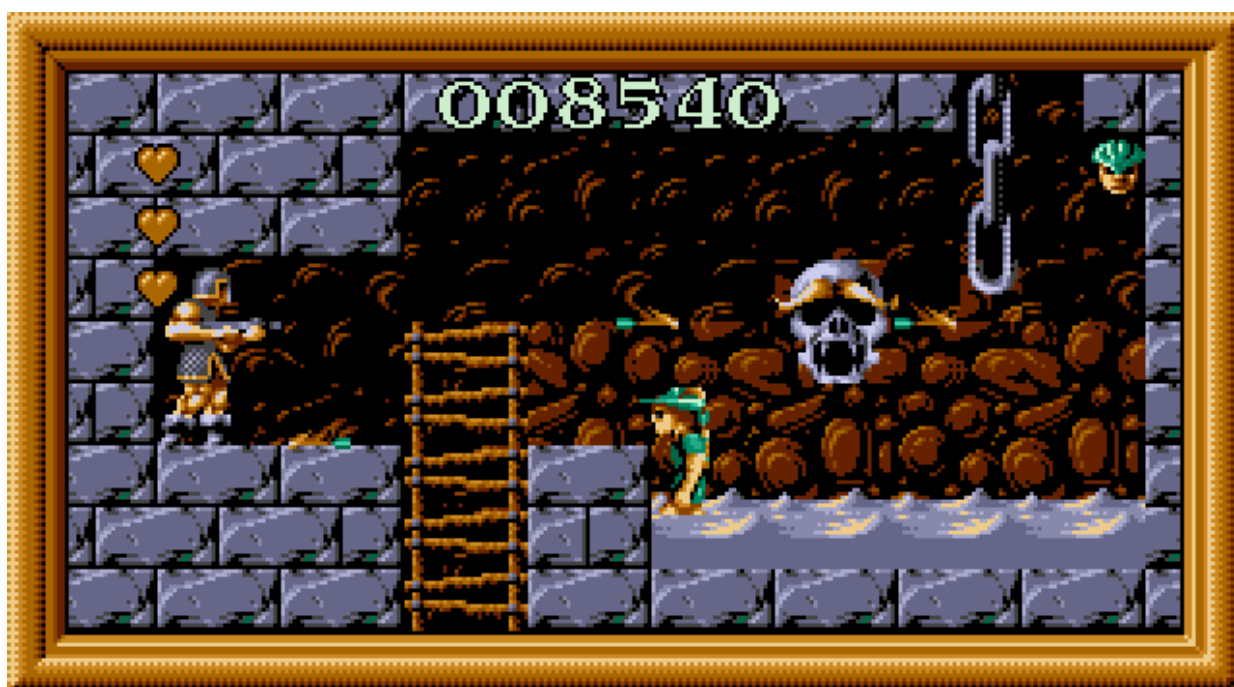
Awhipaway! Awhipaway! Mashin' it up Temple of Doom stylee!

Curiously, well into the twilight years of the 8-bit consoles and home micros, it was subsequently ported to the Commodore 64 and NES in 1992, and Spectrum in 1993. Nevertheless, riding the tunic-tails of the 16-bit zeitgeist, it furnished the Atari ST and Amiga platforms with their own interpretations in 1992. The micro-computer editions were renamed 'Robin Hood: Legend Quest' to discern them from the then ageing original, whilst the NES candidate upheld the 'super' moniker because... because... Nintendo fans need one-word reviews to help them decide what to buy?

Yes, *that* David Whittaker composed the music! History helpfully informs us that Robin is known to have professed to Maid Marian, "everything I do, I do it for you", and his passion seemingly hasn't ebbed one jot here in Legend Quest. He'd lie and die for her, he'd fight for her, walk a wire for her. You get the gist. His raison d'etre revolves around rescuing his beloved better half from the clutches of the tyrannical Sheriff of Nottingham who has imprisoned her at the apex of his labyrinthine fortress.

As merry as ever, Robin reprises his role for the C64 adaptation.

Your crusade obliges you to traverse the levels, eliminating bats, armoured trolls, spiders, archers and so on, with the aid of your trusty bow and arrow. Along the way, keys must be collected to access doors and secret passageways in order to locate hidden gold caches, and edge you that bit closer to your romantic reunion. Augmenting the puzzle-solving aspects of the game, mobile platforms are activated using remote keys. Knowing which keys operate which platforms is the real hindrance to your progress, rather than any of the adversaries you encounter.

'The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981' arrived a tad too late for these poor blighters. Report bat crime readers!

As you might expect it's the Amiga version that will be the focus of my third foray into copycat trial and execution (phew! I finally got there!). Robin Hood and medieval castles go together like cod and chips, so it's no great surprise that any game that taps into the heroic English folklore would draw upon these as a backdrop in which to set the action. So far, so generic, at least where the 8-bit home micro renditions are concerned.

Our *Amiga* port is another matter entirely. It was with the emergence of this instalment that people began remarking on the uncanny resemblance of the Sheriff of Nottingham's abode featured in Legend Quest to another, slightly earlier medieval-*imbued* game, Gods by The Bitmap Brothers.

The Oliver twins weren't directly responsible for developing the Amiga port. Instead, it was outsourced to Damon Redmond who took care of the graphics, and Mark Bell who set to work on the coding, with Allister Brimble providing the

soundtrack. If anyone's heads should be clamped firmly into the stocks for arraignment by rotten veg hurling, it should be those of Damon and Mark.

By way of clarification, Philip informed me…

> "It's worth pointing out that we use Amiga for DPaint 3 from about 1990, but never wrote any games directly on the Amiga. Lots of our games were converted, some we managed, some we didn't and we employed Beno (Mark Bell) & Damon Redmond to convert Super Robin Hood & Firehawk to the ST & Amiga when we first set up an office and started employing people.
>
> We did both write several games for MegaDrive (Genesis), which is REALLY similar to an Amiga, sadly few were released (details in book)."

Everything from the brass and stone decor and colour palette to the protagonist's plodding gait and locomotion appear to have been lifted lock, stock and barrel from Gods. On the contrary, the latter's gameplay mechanics may well have been inspired by the twin's original Robin Hood game design.
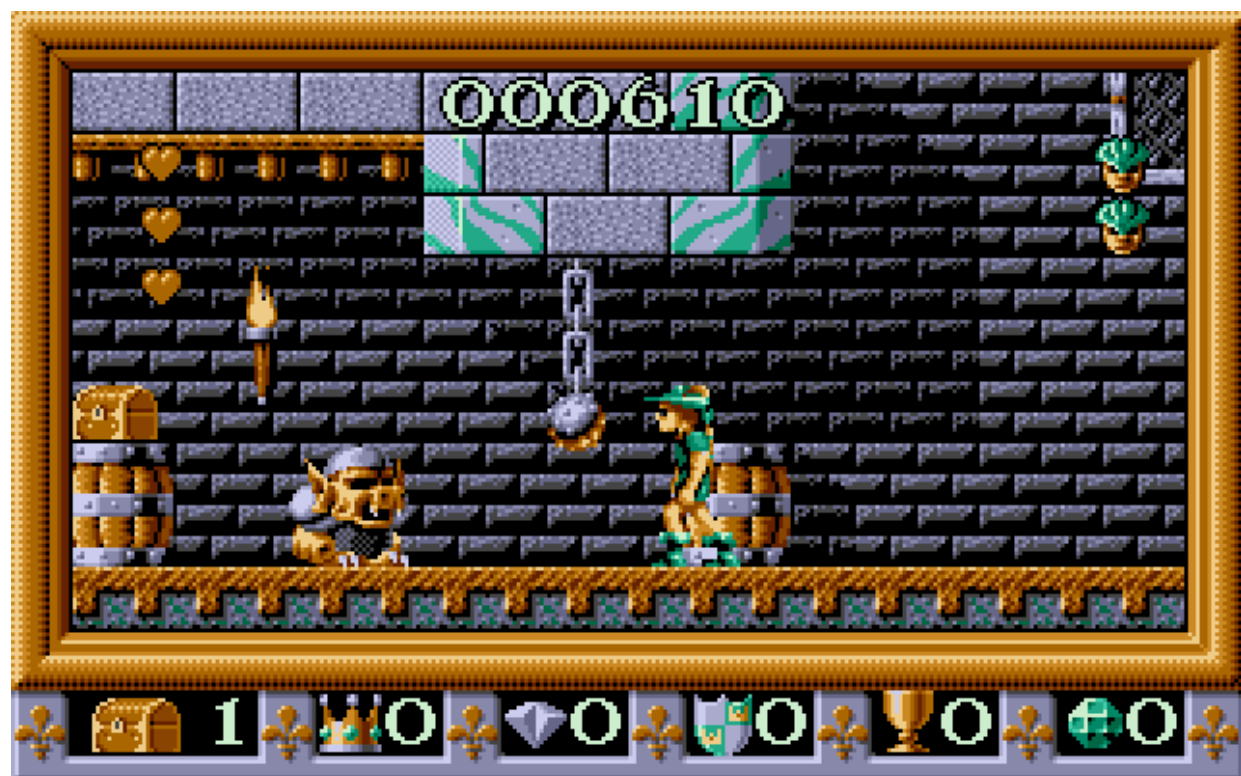
Castle-dwelling, stunted troll-dwarves were all the rage back in the early '90s!

To establish how such apparently blatant plagiarism could have slipped under the radar for a commercial - albeit budget - release, and if Codemasters were subject to litigation, I asked Philip for his verdict.

"Short answer, no. Super Robin Hood was written on Amstrad first in September 1986. Bitmap Bros. wrote Gods in '90/'91. We converted Super Robin Hood to NES in early '92."

*The Super NES version. No, unfortunately, it isn't available for the SNES, but it **is** Super. Hmm, how confusing.*

"We then employed Beno and Damon to convert Super Robin Hood from NES to ST & Amiga (Summer/Autumn '92). It was renamed Legend Quest at the end to differentiate it from the original '86 game.

Any similarities are coincidence... although they may have been inspired by our original Amstrad game."

Notably, the music was again provided by a certain David 'SotB' Whittaker. When I concurred that there are undeniable parallels between Robin Hood mk I and Gods, though that cross-pollination had likely been a factor where the Amiga port is concerned, Philip conceded...

So there you have it. Is Gods a Robin Hood game wrapped in the cloak of Greek mythology?, or is Robin Hood really Gods with a medieval bandit for a leading man? Even Judge Judy may have trouble unravelling this one.

....then again, it would be an awful shame to waste those mouldy tomatoes!
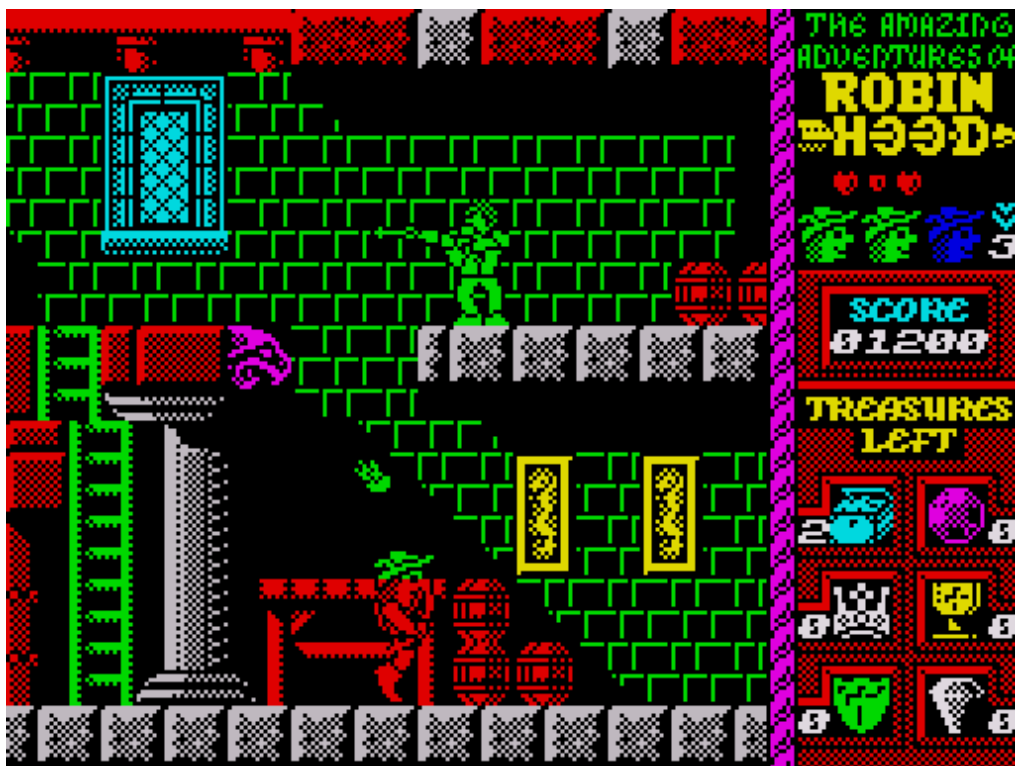
The gorgeous, colour-clash-tastic ZX Spectrum port. I won't hear a word said against it. You had to be there!